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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA ELECTS DANILO TUERK NEW PRESIDENT IN LANDSLIDE

REF: Ljubljana 665, Ljubljana 662, Ljubljana 513

11. (U) On November 11, Slovenians voted in the second round of presidential elections and overwhelmingly elected center-left candidate Danilo Tuerk the new president of the republic for a five-year term. According to unofficial preliminary results, Tuerk won with a strong majority of nearly 70 percent of votes. His opponent Lojze Peterle, whom the coalition government had supported, got slightly more than 30 percent in a 57.78 percent turnout (high for a second round). Although the State Electoral Commission will accept all 43,709 ballots coming from abroad until November 19, these ballots should not change the results. Tuerk, a former Slovenian Ambassador to the UN and later a high-level UN official, will take office on December 23, 2007.

12. (SBU) Prime Minister Janez Jansa, who was in China on an official trip on election day, commented only briefly on the outcome by congratulating Tuerk for victory and saying that "elections are a time when people say what they wish and express their free will." Jansa also expressed his wish for "cooperation with the new president in working for the welfare of Slovenia." Comment: Jansa's November 13 suggestion that the government might resign as a result of its big loss in an election day referendum about partial privatization of the national insurance company might be an attempt at spin. Jansa might have meant to portray the government as the victim in a day where voters cast their votes for president as well as the referendum. End comment.

13. (U) Borut Pahor, the head of opposition and a supporter of Tuerk, commented that Peterle made two crucial mistakes in these presidential elections. The first was the very early announcement of his candidacy without consulting his colleagues from the coalition; the second was Peterle's strong negative campaign just before the second round voting. Some representatives of the opposition view Tuerk's big win as a good predictor for next year's national elections. Minister of Finance Bajuk, who also heads the coalition party NSi, and other coalition members worried that the results showed a "critical relation of voters towards the right-of-center political option."

14. COMMENT (SBU): Peterle's tactic of pushing his coalition partners into a corner by announcing his candidacy without consulting them forced only their grudging support. His decision before the second round to resort to a negative campaign and attack Tuerk caused two reactions. He polarized the political field on the left and right - something that he had sought to avoid during the first round explaining that he wanted to be the president who would unify and not divide people. Secondly, he made Tuerk a victim of attack and thus sympathetic to voters, who punished Peterle for his negative campaign. Voters also likely recognized that with Danilo Tuerk Slovenia gets a calm, cosmopolitan president who is a strong supporter of the rule of law. Tuerk's strong mandate might give him

extra power in promoting values that he believes in. With his great diplomatic experience he should play an important role in assuring a successful Slovene presidency of the EU in the first half of 2008.
END COMMENT.

COLEMAN